

# NOTES FROM N.O.H.O.

## THE RETURN OF VINCE DATES

BY MARTIN MARPRELATE

Vince Dates was strolling past the car park of the truckers' cafe – his assignment had barely started but he was already drinking in detail, digesting the truth of the world around him through thirsty senses.

A couple of teenage girls were shlepping too slowly in the other direction. One wore gold ballet pumps and both had make-up copied from magazines. He didn't try to guess their ages but they weren't hanging around there for him anyway. Vince was almost unnoticeable when he was working. Even his dark glasses were low key: more Soul than R'n'B.

What was noticeable were the round bellies of hauliers in stretched tee shirts, faces concealed by their windscreen sun visors as they watched from their cabs: a row of shadowy box seats as the young bodies paraded by. The cab of a truck can be a dark place, Vince thought.

He knew this area. He had worked its streets undercover, initially as an officer on staff but now freelance. He wasn't police. His area of interest was wider than the law. He specialised in protecting the environment or to put it the way he saw it: anything and everything. His handlers at the council said he tried to understand too much.

"Just get the evidence. Don't get too involved in the case," they would say.

But you didn't earn yourself a case clearance rate like Vince's without getting too involved. You can't protect the environment without getting some of it on your clothes.

The truckers' cafe was at a crossroads. The community of Jimmy's End was over the river and a park away. Spring Boroughs that way and Semilong that way. The station was a two minute totter on high heels. Centuries ago a castle had overlooked the landscape but now the rich lived in the countryside and the common people had surged in, filling the towers and walls. They fought the entrapment with whatever they had – mainly their bodies. If you want to know how far people will go to earn a couple of quid then come down here, Vince pondered grimly. Everyone was trying to get out one way or another, except him.

He was trying to get back in. He had spent time freelancing in other towns and cities to help preserve the secrecy of his identity on the streets of Northampton. Then came a silly little newspaper story after he tracked down some people who had dumped a grand piano on a Scottish mountain. His name and picture had been printed. The reporter had seen the case notes, the photographer had been hanging around outside the court.



It was like bells and whistles going off in Vince's head. He was compromised. No-one took it seriously, not at the newspaper and not among his temporary colleagues in Scotland. But it wasn't about his safety. It wasn't even about not being recognised. It was about not being there. It was about being invisible. It was about being so submerged in the environment that the truth flowed through him and not around him. It was a question of integrity.

He got angry afterwards. He got drunk. He threw away a box of his own surveillance equipment and tried to work like the others did, by the book, but it was useless. Desk jobs and dock watching were not his style. He had to find out if he had lost his nerve. He had to get his mojo back. So Vince went home.

He jogged across the traffic lights and was suddenly a few steps away from the old stomping ground of the street walkers. He refused to call them hookers: that was a word for rock songs and tabloid newspapers. The pavements on Grafton Street's steep incline were empty but Vince couldn't stop himself looking because not very long ago, you never knew what you would see up there.

Stunning showgirls sold themselves alongside pasty, scab-speckled veterans. The effort required to get rid of them was extraordinary. It was like their DNA was part of the soil. Roads had to be closed, punters had to be prosecuted and then the prostitutes were caught, tagged and released into the wild somewhere else. He played no part in it directly but it had affected his world. The litter had changed. The noise had changed. Traffic flow had changed. He was surprised to see those changes had stuck so far. The streets seemed to be clear of sex for now.

Something made him cast a glance back and he saw that the girls had stopped by the truckers' car park to lean against a tree. Their surly eyes met his sunglasses. Their expressions said: "It's not against the law to lean against a tree..."

Everyone turned away from everyone else and Vince carried on walking. He had work to do: protect anything and everything, one job at a time. He had called in a favour at the Guildhall and they had chucked him a bone: a quirky little case about noises. He was back and it felt good. If he turned this into a result good things might follow. People might remember the difference between him and everyone else. He might even remember it.

Vince pulled a small black voice recorder from his pocket, turned it on, announced the date and time and then said: "I'm in Castle Ward looking for the source of a noise reported by several residents. It has been described as a long, low humming sound not unlike the hum of a ship. The complainants say it is persistent and distracting. Anecdotal evidence suggests a number of people hear the sound but no-one has any idea what it is..."

Vince paused and listened. Traffic. Children in the park by the river. Nothing. When he looked up a small elderly Indian woman was standing in front of him with a shawl over her head. She regarded him expectantly with twinkling eyes. She wanted something. Vince was about to ask what it was when the sound came.

It was at once familiar but also new: soft industrial, monotonous musical. It had the lumbering power of thunder and seemed like it ought to end with windows rattling and crockery unsettled – a sense of force rippling out through the world from something massive. But it was also too quiet for that and nothing was shaking. It was an imaginary vibration dying away like an overlooked suggestion. It was like a nagging doubt in the form of sound.

"You have a cigarette?" the old woman asked through a toothless smile.

"Sorry, no, I don't smoke," Vince said, looking around to see if anyone was reacting to the noise. He hadn't been able to locate it. He was searching for people pointing or showing some sign that they had heard it too but the rituals of the park – dog walking, bike riding, swing pushing – were continuing undisturbed.

The woman looked confused for a moment and then asked again: "You have a cigarette?"

Spittle was stringing between her lips. Her tongue slithered out and rolled lewdly along her bottom lip. She took a step towards him.

Vince said distractedly: "Did you hear something then?"

The woman's tongue bulged wetly out of her mouth again and her eyes widened.

"Ciggie?" she persisted.

Vince looked at her. He couldn't believe what he was thinking. That tongue: it was repulsive but she seemed to be making some kind of sexual advance. He immediately dismissed the idea, embarrassed by the sordid depth of his cynicism but then the pale palm of her hand extended towards his crotch. "Sorry, no..." he blurted and blushed hotly, flicking his voice recorder back on as he marched briskly away.

"There are places where strange things happen. Events that started out logical, behaviour that started out rational, forces that started out natural: they can collide and in those places where incompatible normalities intersect, strange things occur. People are wrong to talk about reality as if it is just one thing. I have heard the sound now and it is like nothing I have ever heard before. No-one around me reacted to it, as though they didn't notice it or didn't hear it. I couldn't locate it so I am continuing through the area where it has been reported in the hope of hearing it again."

When the book lady opened the door of her flat a waft of musty, decaying paper filled Vince's nostrils.

"Yes?" she said, looking up at him over her spectacles.

"You've been hearing a strange noise. I'm investigating it," Vince said, flipping open a wallet containing his identity card.

"Really? Right, you better come in then," the book lady said peering at the card and then stepping aside.

Vince walked in saying: "It's better if you don't mention to anyone that I have been here."

"Right," she said, widening her eyes at the gravity of his tone.

Vince navigated his way between stacks of old books and magazines as the book lady bumbled out an apology for the mess that she gave to all visitors to her home. She had kept every book she had ever owned. Why would you throw knowledge away? He answered in his head: to avoid paper mites. He listened past her, almost aching to hear the noise again but twenty minutes of pacing Semilong's streets had failed to bring it back. Now he had gone to one of the homes where it had been reported. The book lady directed him down a canyon of biographies and recipe books to her front room. He accepted her offer of tea so he could be alone and he was drawn to the window. It was one of the few dear spaces to stand.

The street was briefly empty of people. In a window across the road a pair of smooth, full, feminine thighs were visible hanging limply parted off the end of a bed. Partially drawn curtains concealed their owner. The naked torso of a man dipped into view and moved between the legs, nuzzling with feline delicacy. Vince suddenly realised what he was seeing and stepped back. The couple either didn't know or didn't care that they were visible. He turned into the room and there was the book lady with his tea. She arrived beside him and her eyes flashed shock as she saw what he had seen and then turned accusingly to Vince.

"What are you doing? You're not some kind of peeping tom are you? I don't like dark glasses."

Before he could answer the deep mysterious note silenced them both and they exchanged a smile of recognition as it uncoiled languorously in their ears.



"That's it," the book lady hissed, pointing upwards and behind.

"I know, be quiet," Vince said, listening. It was like a low moan from some gigantic distressed beast, a bellow created by collapse, a mournful rush of despair.

"I've got to go. Out there, somewhere..."

Vince headed for the door as though the sound was something blowing away in the wind that could be caught if he was quick enough.

The book lady called after him: "Let me know what you find out..."

Outside, against Vince's expectations, the sound was still audible. He paced quickly up the street and swung left into an alley where an apparently empty car was parked with the engine running. The sound was still there, reverberating around the back to back gardens of Semilong's back to back streets.

Vince began to jog. He almost didn't notice the bodies moving together on the reclined passenger seat of the car. There was a bare bottom cradled between spread thighs. More sex. Young people. He wanted to knock and ask what they thought they were doing: it was the middle of the afternoon, they weren't in any way hidden from passers-by. That can't happen here. Why is that happening here? Instead he carried on. He wanted the sound more. He tried to hold its thinning remnants in his ears as it diminished again. He strained for a trace, a clue, a meaning, but it was gone. Vince looked back at the car from the other end of the alley and clicked his voice recorder into life.

"I have heard the sound twice now and there is no indication of any point of origin or locational variation of intensity that follows a logical pattern. But... there is an illogical pattern."

He paused for a moment, still studying the car.

"Is it in the air? Is it in this place? Is it a trick of the mind, like the way the brain interprets light hitting the eye through raindrops and sees rainbows? Am I hearing rainbows? What's happening to you Vince? Are you hearing rainbows now? Is that what it is?"

He laughed, clicked his voice recorder off. Perhaps it was time to stop looking for explanations, at least for today. He walked thoughtfully back to the office via the Racecourse Park and wondered if it was time to stop looking for explanations altogether. He thought he heard the sound again briefly as he crossed the Barrack Road but he didn't even try to follow it above the braggartly drone of mechanised transport.

Despite thinking they were a bundle of abandoned clothes, Vince was somehow not surprised to find two winos having sex behind a tree. Their arses were so much cleaner than their faces. She was underneath. Vince walked over, smiling. "Did you hear that strange deep noise just then?" he asked politely.

"Give us a kisssss..." said the glassy eyed, red faced woman.

The man, equally glassy-eyed, looked at Vince then said to his lover: "Erica see, I said I heard it."

"Never said you didn't," she grinned. "It was my Horn of Love."

She cackled.

"It's the trains mate," the man said to Vince urgently, as though he feared the power of Erica's Horn of Love and had to find another explanation.

"I used to work on the trains. You hear strange things in the yards over there." The conversation stopped there with the man pinned over Erica with his elbows locked. He stared at Vince until Erica slapped him.

"Happy now? Had a good look?" she asked Vince so he stepped back, opening his palms and bid them a good afternoon.

He clicked his voice recorder on one last time.

"No single fact explains this sound but it is possible to close this case if you wish. The noise can be attributed to a random combination of distorting effects on air movement around rolling stock. Or, and believe me you would be surprised if you had seen for yourself, you could call it Erica's Horn of Love."





# ARE YOUR DREAMS 3 SIZES TOO BIG AT NIGHT

## NATTY BROOKER: THE ART OF SPACEMEN 3

By Gary Ingham

*"There has been no exhibition before because I was off my head on psychedelic drugs day after day for 25 years. Not eating or sleeping properly, moving house constantly, living in a world full of goblins and shit. Most of the art was on the floor covered in gob and garbage, and usually given away to people I can't remember the names of. That lifestyle doesn't lend itself to keeping a nice portfolio together. It's been very interesting though."*

Yes, there has been an issue with the art being mostly given away over the years. "A lot of the stuff in the exhibition is just doodles I made coming down off mushrooms really" confesses Natty from his Long Buckby bungalow, "I can't even remember who I gave it to 'coz I was that out of me head half the time. I judged the people would look after them. No point me having it, my life was chaos. You can't live a tidy life on mushrooms; you don't even remember to get dressed usually. The exhibition was Will's idea, bless his heart. I'm not a huge fan of publicity. I'm not that interested by money I'm afraid. The Spacemen stuff has become a bit of a drag. This is the last time I'll be involved with it. I don't mind those origins, but I was just off me head and had nothing better to do than be in a band. I'm not bitter & twisted about it but there's no real love. It was just a small part of my weird little fucked up life."

Spacemen 3 were a shot in the arm of 80's underground rock, and that's not just a euphemism. The bracing fuzz drone of their short trip from the backroom bars of Rugby, Northampton & Coventry to international acclaim has an ongoing influence & relevance. The introduction of the unmusical but possessed artistic spirit of Mr. Ugly into The Spacemen on drums around 1984 sparked up creative motion. He brought American Delta blues, Roots, Jazz & Soul to the attention of public schoolboys Pete Kember & Jason Pierce, a lineage they soon cast themselves as following much more seriously than the typical comparisons the band had with The Velvet Underground or Iggy & the Stooges. Early flyers & posters designed by

Natty were the start of an aesthetic that became as one with the Spacemen and the bands that formed since their demise, one such early imageless flyer said only 'Are Your Dreams 3 Sizes too Big At Night?'. There were three members in this third line-up of Spacemen, and oh lord yes, they were starting to open their third eye in their communal dole cheque sponsored drug dens/abodes of Hillmorton & Rugby, or Drugby as it became known. The resonance of the number 3 struck them, and it was tagged onto the bands name.

Natty lasted 3 or 4 years with the band through the 'Taking Drugs To Make Music To Take Drugs To' and 1st LP 'Sound Of Confusion' before the regimentation from inflamed ego's around him got too much for his easily bored and restlessly free spirit. "Every house I lived in was full of people on debilitating drugs, the room me, Jason Pierce & Roscoe lived in, the wholedownstairs living room, floor, walls to ceiling, was a painted and photo cut-up collage, and these weirdo's on acid could never find their way out." Rooms were filled with paintings still talked of with wonder. Bulbous-eyed Mickey Mouse heads, strangulating eye sockets and space ships, oozes of colours distorting with damp over time in these rotten decadent domiciles. One of the few surviving pieces from this time in the exhibition was OOZING THROUGH THE OZONE LAYER, a Bosch meets Ralph Steadman stream of barely consciousness made for a compilation tape cover someone from Pulp was

putting together in the mid 80's. It ended up living on Will Carruthers wall yellowing in a plume of narc smoke.





When the exhibition came to London on July 15th 2010 at Hoxton Bar & Grill, the event had snowballed into the first Spacemen 3 show in twenty years "It never started as a spacemen reunion, but gradually people got interested and lent their support purely out of respect for Natty and his work. I had half an idea, blagged a venue, started a rumour and hoped that it would all work out. Amazingly it did." Sure did. The Spacemen line-up of Pete Kember (aka Sonic Boom), Will, Jonny Mattock, & Mark Refoy, with help from Indie-rock feedback professor Kevin Shields & original champion Pat Fish, made the 300 capacity room throb with pounding metallic heartbeat of 'Walkin' With Jesus', 'Revolution' & 'Suicide'. Jolted to life like some super pissed Frankenstein's monster, unbelievably, they hadn't rehearsed, "We didn't even sound check," admits Mr. Carruthers, "its all muscle memory". A testament to better living through chemistry. But hmm hey, where was Jason? Doesn't he live in Hoxton? Will? "No idea. I got word through to him, but we haven't spoken directly in fifteen years. It was purely an accident that it happened on his doorstep. It might have been nice, but in the end Kevin Shields agreed to do it anyway ...so, we did alright without him?" Yep. Another notable absentee was the man himself, how's that Natty? "After 15 or 20 years playing gigs to no-one for no money, you try and have a good time but it wears you down playing for years & years for no money. I can't go to places like that anymore, it just brings back bad memories, hahahaha!"

What sort of person went to the exhibitions? What was the response? Will? "I suppose the majority of people have been Spacemen 3 and Spiritualized fans, so, it's the usual mixture of druggies, misfits, supermodels, captains of industry and law enforcement officers, who have all been uniformly dazzled by Natty's work and the entertainment on offer. There has also been a gratifying interest in the art from people who never heard any of the music. Which is nice. I think it stands beautifully by itself."

Brought up just outside Watford village near the old M1 Blue Boar Café, Natty's artistic vent was fuelled by the period and local environment. "I love this area, as it was anyway, the A5, Watling St., is a beautiful thing, runs all the way to Wales.

I used to admire the travelling tramps here, I'd still love to be one, live in the woods in a hammock & canopy, shit in the woods. All I ever wanted to do was roam around the countryside, take loads of drugs, make music, try & find a band to be in. I always listen to music when I paint, it helps, it all fits together, its all rhythm, the drums of early man & birdsong. The linoleum on the kitchen floor of our bungalow in the 60's where I was born was an influence if I'm honest. Jazzy couple of lines in grey & orange with horrible marble bits. I did go to the library to discover a whole new world later, Dada & Surrealism, but the nature of the area was the key, the wibbly nature of vine leaves, flowing grass in the wind or ripples on the water. Webs & decay on wasteland. All that shit."

With a shrug of boredom at inter-band bickering he fled Rugby craziness for good. "It is so physically draining on your resources & emotions taking psychedelics for so long. I had to move out of Rugby to live in a caravan in the middle of nowhere with no electricity or running water for ten years to try and build myself up into a human being again.

"The art never stopped. Natty has always been working, on ANYTHING as always, stone, glass, floorboard. As well as involvement with various bands you've never heard of and making comic books, he is finally starting a solo music project under the name 'Special Eggs'. An album is in the psychedelic pipeline tentatively titled 'Silent Weirdo' ("coz that's how people see me I suppose, with the tattoo on the back of my head and only really ever having a conversation with my dog,"), or possibly 'For Sale: One World (For Spares or Repairs)' ("coz I find the world I'm disappearing from quickly is completely fucked up & insane. What happened?"), or possibly something else entirely, who knows? An exhibition of more recent works is planned for next year. "People might see me as being quite

poor financially, but I've lived quite a luxurious life. 25 years off your head avoiding the 'ordinary' is taking the piss really. The drugs had little to do with where the art comes from, they just gave me a new dimension on the weirdness that was already there. As a child you don't need drugs to feel these things, the simple things you don't notice about the world in your normal consciousness is what psychedelics are all about. Things you notice as a kid staring into the grains in a wood door or a curtain and faces or images come out at you. I didn't just drink mushroom tea to be out me head, I wanted to see what it was like to view the world from a medieval point of view. The dark tones of religious paintings & people turning into hobgoblins becomes your reality. A visitation from Jesus & inexplicable magic are things that are a constant in that altered perception. Everything becomes boring after long enough though, apart from the making of art itself, that was always very necessary, the rest of it was bollocks really."

Artwork available to buy & info:  
<http://www.nattybrooker.co.uk/gallery.html>





# BEYOND THE NORM

BY NORMAN ADAMS

## WHAT'S FOR THE CHOP?

Some weeks in to the Libcon government and we have an indication of things to come, or should that read, things to go?

The 'Chronicle & Echo', Northampton's local paper, reported in May about the effect the free swimming scheme for youngsters under the age of 16 and the elderly over 60 years was having. It was a real 'good news story' and at a council meeting a few days later, a councillor of the controlling group stated "the initiative had contributed positively to the health and well being of the under 16s and over 60s". The scheme in the first 12 months had been used by 25,000 youngsters and more than 3,000 pensioners.

I was later shocked to find out that the new coalition government had decided to pull the funding that was expected to be in place until 2011. Unfortunately the initiative will now close on 31st July 2010, although local authorities can carry on the scheme if they want to fund it themselves. Could this lead to tension between our Northampton Liberal Democrat administration and their new link up with the Conservatives? Could this be one last nail in the election prospects come May 2011?

This scheme is worth fighting for, as is the free bus travel for pensioners and the disabled, as well as all other key provisions that help to give some semblance of a normal life to people with mobility problems. [At the time of writing this article emails are coming to me about a campaign surrounding these proposed cuts].

"Free travel and free swimming is part of the State Pension, just as the Winter Fuel Allowance is. If those benefits go then there will have to be an increase in the pension amount. It really is as simple as that. The state pension is modest enough without any cuts. Pensioners have done nothing to cause this financial crisis. I for one am not ready to make any form of sacrifice for the suited idiots who did cause it and who make more money in a year than I did in a lifetime of work. Let them pay."

**I tend to agree with this pensioner and the lady with her nine year old daughter who said:**

"I am up in arms about the decision to end free swimming. They are cutting it for the over-60s as well. At my daughter's school some of the children can't swim. My daughter belongs to a swimming club and we take advantage of free swimming. A lot of older people with mobility problems can swim because the water supports them. But now it may be too expensive. It is a pity. It seemed as though they were encouraging more swimmers in the run-up to the Olympics. Now they are taking it all away."



*As the chair of Northampton's Defend Council Housing, I take an interest in not only the homes, but in the tenants of the homes. It is important to understand their needs of local people in order to effectively serve the local community. The most up to date information available about Northampton council housing tenants indicates that 55% of tenants living in council properties are retired or have a disability, 18% are unemployed and only 1% are students or in a government training scheme.*

*So what is on offer to this section of Northampton residents? [The tenants that live in Northampton's council homes]. As the promised austerity drive takes place, we have already been told that the mix will be 80% cuts and 20% tax rises.*

### **Spending cuts to take 80% of the load.**

*More workers will lose jobs adding to the 18% that are already unemployed, the jobless will lose benefits, the retired and the ones with a disability, that is 55% will find the services they depend on are gone, or have been so watered down that makes them unfit for purpose as in the case of the Sheltered Housing Warden service, or will have be privatised. And with no new training schemes on the cards, the 1% in a government scheme will not grow and will likely drop, leaving a new generation to face what?*

*We are not, as the bastards put it, "all in this together". Bosses who win new private sector contracts for public sector services will not be feeling the pinch. Bankers will not be throwing themselves out of office windows.*

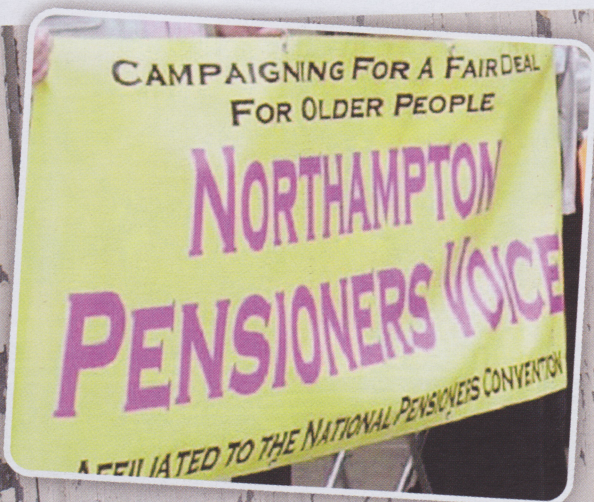
### **Politicians may pay the price with lost office. People like council tenants will pay a higher price – the needless squandering of their lives.**

*'Events dear boy, events'...was the response to a journalist when asked what is most likely to blow governments off course. made by Harold Macmillan, a British Conservative politician who served six years as Prime Minister at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s.*

*On the subject of events, what can blow governments and local authorities off course is when the population refuse to go along with them.*

*The Sheltered Housing Tenants in Northampton were out on the streets again in June, Led by Mr Fred O'Donnell and Mrs Pearl Farey of the campaigning group 'Residents 4 Residents'. Both Fred and Pearl are 90 years of age, both served their country in World War Two. Fred was a Japanese prisoner of war and one of the few remaining survivors of the sinking of the Lisbon Maru. Pearl was mentioned in dispatches for her work in India with the St John's Ambulance.*

*This issue will, it seems, not go away. The council had managed to put it into the long grass for a few months, by calling a review, but as the review was published with no recommendation to meet the campaign demands on the reintroduction of an on-site Warden, the group, who have regular meetings, decided that the only response that may be listened to was to take to the streets again.*







### TIME TO PUMP UP THE VOLUME AND TELL THIS Council and its Councillors

We do not intend to keep this to writing letters to the press, if you think that we will just accept that you can cut any services without a fight you are more deluded than I thought—your attempts to gag our members will fail—your use of injunctions will fail



### Residents 4 Residents NORTHAMPTON JUNE 2010 Sheltered Housing Tenants

A big thank you to Northampton AMICUS union branch for arranging and covering the cost of refreshments for the residents 4 residents members and supporters, and to Tony Ansell and his staff at 'All Saints' for the service and assistance on the day  
To all the members of the public and the Independent Councillors who voiced support at both council meetings attended on the day.  
AND finally to Mrs Farey and Mr O'Donnell for being an inspiration to all

The campaign was covered throughout the day on radio and on news slots on the television across the east of England, and in the local paper the following day with a half page article "OAPs 'betrayed' by warden care."

As one member said to the television camera and citizens of Northampton over the megaphone "TIME TO PUMP UP THE VOLUME and tell this Council and its Councillors - We do not intend to keep this to writing letters to the press, if you think that we will just accept that you can cut any services without a fight you are more deluded than I thought—your attempts to gag our members will fail—your use of injunctions will fail" and then proceeded to question the reports findings, specifically the statement from the portfolio holder for housing who had said "it was not possible to return to on-site wardens". The response of the group member with the megaphone was "it's possible just down the road in Milton Keynes, who still have on site wardens. If this is what localism produces then we should demand a National Standard of care, not this post code lottery. It all has the whiff of a Norman Tebbit about it, he who told the unemployed to get on their bikes and look for work. Are we now telling our elderly and disabled to get on their mobility scooters and look for care?"

Later that week RESIDENTS 4 RESIDENTS put out a press statement thanking the following:

"Many thanks to all who supported on the day by attendance, thanks to others who could not attend but supported in other ways: Printing and the delivery of flyers etc.

A big thank you to Northampton AMICUS union branch for arranging and covering the cost of refreshments for the residents 4 residents members and supporters, and to Tony Ansell and his staff at 'All Saints' for the service and assistance on the day. To all the members of the public and the Independent Councillors who voiced support at both council meetings attended on the day. AND finally to Mrs Farey and Mr O'Donnell for being an inspiration to all"

As we sat beneath the portico of 'All Saints' enjoying our coffee and cakes, it entered my mind that we were in the very spot that poet John Clare often sat and I was of a mind - has care moved on much in the years from 1840's to now? Then another poet came to mind, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Poet Laureate of Humanity and 'Voice of the Voiceless'. Perhaps that, if put collectively, is the role Residents 4 Residents are fulfilling:

'We are the voice of the voiceless, through us, the dumb shall speak; till the deaf world's ear be made to hear the cry of the wordless weak....'

Ella Wilcox also wrote the lines "Laugh, and the world laughs with you; Weep, and you weep alone". We in Residents 4 Residents don't intend to see our elderly left to weep alone.

### Attempts to gag and the use of injunctions

The use of injunctions by Northampton Borough Council in what we see as an attempt to silence one of our members, and frighten others from speaking out, seems to have backfired - Teddy McNabb has an ever increasing number of people coming up to him and basically saying 'Good on yer', 'What has been done to the warden service is a disgrace' and 'Thank you for standing up to them'.

Teddy has taken the decision to take the council on in court. If the council thought that the use of the law and litigation would send Teddy looking for the nearest stone to hide under, then it seems to have got it all wrong again.

Teddy has informed the council that he intends to fight this and is representing himself, which has been replied to by Northampton Borough Council Legal Services with the following: "In terms of you representing yourself for the hearing on 28 June 2010, we are somewhat disappointed and concerned that you have not instructed any legal advisor." And: "Should you wish to contest our application the matter will be re-listed for a full trial, which will take place at a later date."

So at this time of writing we don't know the date of the trial, but the case once again brings into the public domain the question: is officialdom now full of total wimps? What Teddy has alleged to have done is to write a few strong email's.

The problem is that in trying to protect public officials from aggression, we have now turned them into ultra-sensitive wimps who cannot distinguish between anger and violence. Understanding frustration and addressing concerns used to be part and parcel of the job for anyone who came into contact with the public, but no longer.

It will be interesting to total up the cost to the taxpayer as Northampton Borough Council v Edward McNabb runs its course through this legal farce.

TO BE CONTINUED .....



Above: Fred and Pearl.



# SARAJEVO NIGHTS

By Alan Moore

*Continuing from last issue's Eastern District diatribe, Alan Moore discusses his subsequent return engagements with Northampton's Frankenstein social experiment and asks why these things always end up with the brain of a homicidal maniac.*

I lived on Blackthorn's hastily-appended zip drive, Maidencastle, for around two years with my ex-wife and our first daughter. In that time I managed to kick start a career as cartoonist/writer/music journalist/whatever, and got arrested as part of a misinformed and unsuccessful dawn raid in which police seized dozens of rolled-up biblical quotations (a quaint family heirloom) believing them to be unusually pious roach material for jazz cigarettes. I witnessed the beginnings of the new-built area's disintegration, with kids dropping breeze-blocks from the footbridge over Wellingborough Road onto the traffic, yards below; with plywood houses catching fire; with rapists operating in the fringe of trees that curtained Blackthorn off from Lings; with only two police cars covering the whole development. A neighbour locked out of the house by his long-suffering partner went for the grand gesture and messed up slashing his wrists there on the doorstep. Luckily, by 1980 with a second daughter imminent we'd sorted out a transfer to a smaller, older but friendlier council house back in central Northampton at the top of Wallace Road. I still knew people on the Eastern District, though, and thus would have an intermittent ringside seat at its decline.

During the 1980s, for a while it looked as if the locals might successfully adapt to their embattled circumstances by spontaneously organising into vague anarcho-criminal communities subscribing to semi-sustainable black market economics, safeguarding the trade in weed or hooky goods by means of an efficient Citizens Band early warning system operating house-to-house, which also functioned as a useful network for mums to keep tabs upon their children's whereabouts. Throughout this period, however, although there were by now more than two police cars in the area and more dawn raids, there was the feeling that police and residents were polarising drastically into two mutually antagonistic teams. These were the Thatcher years, of course, when that variety of social schism was a lot more prevalent and when we'd come up with a name for places like the Eastern District, jerry-built during the previous decade; we called them sink estates, although back then we hadn't really got a clue regarding how much further places like that would be sinking, or what into.

Around 1990, with a young American replacement artist working on my since-abandoned and Northampton-set Big Numbers project, I called in at Blackthorn's Pig & Whistle to provide my co-creator with an insight into life on the run-down estates that he'd be called upon to draw. The main bar was a *Deadwood* premonition, populated mostly by the big and bearded, wherein trade disputes were settled on the spot with baseball bats, and spliffs were passed as casually as complimentary peanuts. It was just like Amsterdam, but if the Nazis had won World War Two. Blackthorn appeared to have seceded from the U.K., like a nightmare version of *Passport to Pimlico*, but it was already apparent that the new republic had been founded upon nothing more substantial than recycled piss and sour adrenaline. The atmosphere of armed truce clearly wasn't going to last.

Within a month or two the whole estate seemed to have turned into a Beirut-themed amusement park: pub sieges, closing-time exchanges that bloomed into rampages, police cars that bloomed into fireballs with crack and guns beginning to creep in on the periphery. Around this time I had a documentary crew from Channel Four in town working on a projected three-part piece that would attempt to trace a line through Europe which commenced in bombed-out Sarajevo and concluded on some far northerly isle where there were only screaming seabirds and a U.S. early-warning installation, wandering through London and Northampton on the way. We shot some night-time footage on the Cherry Lodge Road and were forced to mollify the likeable eleven year-old sociopaths performing wheelies through the background of our interview by offering them screen-time of their own. When asked for an opinion with regard to the then-recent riots, one beaming child replied that they'd been okay, but "would have been better if there'd been more fireworks." This remark appeared to me to be a perfect point from which to cut to smouldering Balkan rubble as example of a ruckus that had added pyrotechnics, but then, frankly, I know very little about television.

Over the next fifteen or so years I gradually lost touch with Blackthorn. My remaining contacts in the area died or moved out to neighbourhoods with less Class 'A's and firearms; fewer home invasions or punishment beatings. The one reliable report I had came in the form of local funksters P-Hex with their drive-by song-thrush Lindsey Spence and his repeated admonitions that it was indeed still "Grim on the Eastern District". Then, sometime last year, I took a walk round the Bellinge estate with the rhyme-slinger Influence and history-head Lee Hutchinson to check the crime-prevention fence which in some instances requires the residents to make a half-mile detour before visiting a neighbour on their court's far side, while any enterprising criminal owning a car-jack can just pry the bars apart and therefore be not even slightly inconvenienced. The barrier reinforces nothing save the sense of isolation and confinement, where tenants throw back their bedroom curtains in the morning to a view of bars as if they were already in a prison or, more probably, a zoo. Admittedly, the bars are a nice vegetation-green, embellished here and there with wrought iron flowers designed by local kids, as if to say 'Well, yes, it is a bit Orwellian, but look! Daisies!' Their inherent message, though, is undiluted: here's the wall that we've put up between you and the world.

Next time I'll be concluding with a preview of the district's future, where green spaces can be clawed back for development because they have 'no function'. See you then.